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DIRECTORATE OF
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Special Report

Guatemala -- The Pre-Election Situation

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GUATEMALA—THE PRE-ELECTION SITUATION

The frail political stability laboriously developed under the present Guatemalan administration will suffer serious strains during the political campaign now under way for the general elections next March. Violence has shown a steady increase since May

Supporters of the rightist presidential candidate have threatened similar action if it appears that their candidate will lose the election or be deprived of the presidency illegally. With the ruling Revolutionary Party in control of the electoral machinery, either development is possible.

The most important ingredient in the political spectrum is the military. The armed forces have the power to install the legally elected candidate or anyone else they wish. So far in this century, only one duly elected Guatemalan President has turned over control to a duly chosen successor.

BACKGROUND

During the President's three years of rule, some 15 months have been under one form or another of emergency condition. As a result, overt politics have been suspended and there has been little partisan commentary, organizational activity, or even interest on the part of a largely apathetic electorate.

Early in its term, the Mendez government was characterized as the country's first reformist regime since 1954, and its supporters hoped that it would provide a clear-cut contrast to the military regimes that had ruled for the previous 12 years. President Mendez has done little, however, to establish meaningful patterns for social and economic change that would meet the country's pressing needs. He has vacillated under pressure from vested interests, and early in his term it became apparent that his chief desire was to complete his term. Bureaucratic red tape and a generally tight budgetary situation notwithstanding, the government has been completing and inaugu-

rating a series of small public works projects, but these small efforts have proved disappointing to the largely forgotten electorate that brought the government to power.

Nevertheless, over the past few months there has developed a growing faith in the government's viability, and stability—delicate though it may be—probably rests on a broader base than it has in the past ten years or more. The military, for example, have chosen not to leave the barracks on several occasions during Mendez' term that earlier could have precipitated a take-over. Foremost among these events was the sudden dismissal in March 1968 of three high-ranking officers responsible for many of the excesses perpetrated during the government's counterinsurgency campaign from late 1966 to mid-1967. The military accepted the dismissals and the extensive shifts that followed. For the first time in over a decade the military yielded to civilian rule.

Following the command changes, Mendez issued orders for a continuation of the

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counterinsurgency campaign—albeit on a reduced scale—which is still under way. The President's action served to dispel much of the military's distrust for him. Since then Mendez has gradually placed officers loyal to the principles of constitutionality in positions of authority and has gone out of his way to curry the military's favor. The President's brother, Colonel Guillermo Mendez, an army doctor, has been an excellent liaison between the palace and military headquarters. In addition, the fact that the President is not a charter member of the ruling party also has made relations with the military more cordial.

Nevertheless, the President still lacks support in depth from the armed forces, and the trend toward increased professionalism within the military could be quickly reversed. The military's long tradition of acting as the country's political arbiter is difficult to outgrow. Moreover, Guatemala's endemic economic and social problems, and any resumption of large-scale Communist insurgency, could generate sufficient unrest to provoke a military take-over. The officer corps is dominated by conservative, virulent anti-Communists who are prone to view any social or economic change as a threat to their favored position. The corps is prepared to prevent the left from regaining the prominence it enjoyed during the years prior to 1954.

The military's suspicion of the ruling Revolutionary Party is likely to become a critical element as the election nears. Fear that the left may return to power may cause agitation within the armed forces for a coup. The fact that a well-known rightist, Colonel Carlos Manuel Arana Osorio, is running for the presidency for the two rightist parties, the National Liberation Movement and the Institutional Democratic Party will make the military's nonpolitical role more difficult; there is already evidence that army person-

nel have begun to pressure peasants in the northeast to vote for Arana.

THE POLITICAL PARTIES

The ruling Revolutionary Party (PR) was founded by the President's brother, Mario, in 1957 and was to have been his vehicle to the palace. When he died on the eve of elections in October 1965, the candidacy passed to his brother.

By Guatemalan standards the PR is a well-organized political party. It enjoys substantial and widespread support, including an extensive network of rural cadres. As the government party, it enjoys a steady flow of funds and other public services.

The PR's presidential candidate, Mario Fuentes Pieruccini, is not regarded as a threat by vested interest groups. Fuentes served as minister of finance under Mendez and most observers believe he has done a creditable job of running the ministry.

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Mario Fuentes Pieruccini

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In his campaign Fuentes reaffirms the present government policy condemning violence, but favors using the legitimate security forces instead of vigilante groups against it. He also says he intends to combat Communism with positive social action. Although history has demonstrated that Guatemalans, especially the highland Indians, tend to vote for the party in power, Fuentes will have to overcome his lack of charisma before he can make a major impact on the rest of the electorate.

The two rightist parties, the National Liberation Movement (MLN) and the Institutional Democratic Party (PID), joined forces early this year to back Colonel Carlos Arana. The MLN traces its history back to the "liberationists," a group of

political club than a party, also represents the country's more conservative families. Colonel Arana's "law and order" campaign theme and strong anti-Communist stand make him an appealing candidate to the oligarchy.

Colonel Arana, former commander of the powerful army brigade at Zacapa, is credited with clearing northeastern Guatemala of the Communist guerrillas. Arana armed some 3,000 civilians to augment his army forces and gave them carte blanche in dealing with those they believed to be "Communists." Many innocent persons were killed, and in many cases it became apparent that the civilians were doing away with political foes. After he was relieved in March 1968, Arana served as ambassador to Nicaragua until April 1969 when he returned to begin his campaign.



Carlos Manuel Arana Osorio

men instrumental in overthrowing the Communist-leaning Arbenz government in 1954. Because of its rightist orientation, the party's platform has always been strongly anti-Communist; most of its support comes from the officer corps and wealthy business and landed families. The PID, more a

The Christian Democratic Party (DCG) was founded in 1955 by a group of wealthy, devoutly Catholic Guatemalans. The character of the party has since changed profoundly, and by 1964 it began to espouse a liberal reformist program. The DCG can count on only a small following, but it may attract many of the disillusioned leftists who



Jorge Lucas Caballeros

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GUATEMALA: FAR Guerrilla Zones



*Cuban adviser attached



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have abandoned the PR. The DCG candidate, Jorge Lucas Caballeros, is a former army officer and served as minister of finance during the Peralta government (1963-66).

THE COMMUNIST LEFT

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Since May 1969 there has been a marked rise in violence in Guatemala City and in the north-eastern region of the country. A further increase could produce near panic in the capital. The 150-man pro-Cuban Rebel Armed Forces (FAR) has been responsible for most of the recent killings, bombings, and kidnappings.

many months of inactivity have caused serious friction, divisions and morale problems. Presumably the bombing of a TV station in Guatemala City on 20 May, which caused about \$500,000 damage, and the assassination on 1 June of prominent MLN leader Mario Lopez Villatoro and his bodyguard have remedied some of these problems. Lopez' killing is perhaps the most serious single incident since US Ambassador Mein's assassination last year.

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Many FAR leaders and experienced cadre have been killed by government forces during the past two years and the movement has been forced to rebuild its rural support network, retrain and recruit personnel, and generally revamp the organization.

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The army still lacks mobility and communications, despite a recent improvement in its capabilities.

The FAR's proven strength, however, lies in its ability to carry out sporadic and well-planned urban attacks. Over the years it has published lists of persons targeted for assassination and its ability to carry out the threats has been a demoralizing factor.

The Guatemalan Communist Party (PGT) also has suffered serious internal divisions, and it has been driven further underground in the past year and a half. At present, the PGT is engaged in organizing and enlisting support. It has a tactics school located near Mazatenango and an urban resistance front in Guatemala City. The party has not been very active and reports suggest that it would prefer for the time being to avoid terrorist action that would polarize sentiment against the left and benefit the chief law and order candidate, Colonel Arana. If the FAR begins a new offensive, however, the PGT probably will be pulled into the struggle.

THE OUTLOOK

The prospects for a peaceful campaign and transfer of power are not encouraging. Although law and order are principal concerns of the electorate, it appears that the Communist terrorists intend to maintain a fairly steady level of violence. Should the terrorists succeed in assassinating one of the presidential candidates or another political or military leader, President Mendez would be faced with a serious dilemma. He would be under heavy pressure from rightists to crack down hard on the terrorists, a move that would further alienate the left and might weaken support for the Revolutionary Party. Hesitation, on the other hand, might provoke a military coup or at least the re-emergence of the right-wing vigilante groups dormant since last year, and the

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eye-for-an-eye struggle between the left and the right would resume. Colonel Arana would benefit from either development.

A renewal of the bloodletting, traditional in a country that lacks political maturity, would

turn back the progress that has been achieved in the past several years. Confidence in the central government would be eroded, and prospects for a violent solution would grow.

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